

Earth-Friendly Gardening & Landscaping



Rethinking lawns in commercial landscapes

Maintaining healthy turf areas around most commercial properties requires a considerable investment of time and resources. Moreover, those lawns also produce a prodigious amount of clippings which must be recycled, either through the preferable practice of grasscycling, or by transporting clippings to an appropriate recycling facility, which is also an expensive proposition.

Fortunately, a growing number of property managers are learning that selecting alternatives to landscaping with grass leads to both long-term savings and to exceptional aesthetic values — which can be seen as an investment in advertising: visually separating that colorful, creative site from the boring sea of grass around them.

Excellent examples of departures from lawn-only landscapes can be seen in the District of Columbia, where projects sponsored by the Federal Reserve and Pennsylvania Avenue Development Authority called in the landscape pioneering firm of Oehme and Van Sweden to install traffic-stopping plantings of dramatic ornamental grasses, native wildflowers, colorful perennials, and assorted ground covers. There were even some spaces where small lawn areas were used to contrast with the bolder plant materials — but they were very small.

There are horticultural and environmental benefits to altering traditional landscape designs. From a tree-care perspective, it is important to realize that one of the most common causes for tree mortality is disease resulting from injuries to bark and shallow surface roots — almost universally inflicted by lawn mowers and trimming equipment. Replacing turf under trees with wood or leaf mulch, or replanting with low to no-maintenance ground covers, eliminates these injuries and the costly need to replace specimen trees — in addition to paying for the removal and recycling of a dead tree. Lawn care needs are also reduced, whether in terms of mowing, aerating, fertilizing, or irrigating.

Moreover, property managers have often commented on the difficulty of keeping grass growing vigorously under the shade of a mature tree. In fact, grass generally needs more light than is ordinarily found in full shade; turf plots under trees should be replaced with shade-loving

ground covers or mulch. Consider also that grass roots aggressively and too-successfully compete with trees for moisture and nutrients. During drought periods, trees can suffer from this stress and decline in health or perhaps even die. Replacing grass with any of the scores of ground covers commonly available will eliminate trouble areas in the landscape, improve tree health, and add color and beauty to your site. For additional information about ground covers and mulching contact horticultural specialist Joe Keyser at 240.777.7720 or visit the Natural Landscaping page of the DEP website: natural.askdep.com.



Replacing grass with mulch islands and perennial plantings or sun-loving ground covers is especially important along curbs, streets, streams, and other watershed areas. These alternate plantings can serve as valuable buffers to prevent erosion and the run-off of lawn fertilizers and other chemicals. Plantings along curbs or streets also serve to frame your landscape, present color to the eye immediately, and then draw the visitor's eye to your company's building. Again, nibbling away at turf areas will ultimately reduce the amount of lawn care required, while the "frame" effect will make remaining turf areas more attractive overall.

Combining plantings along pathways, site perimeters, and parking lots with ground cover plantings under trees, will add a level of sophistication and elegance to your landscape — and your corporate image — which is generally lacking in sites carpeted with grass from curb to foundation. And the new design will soon pay for itself as the

more intensive needs of turf management and recycling grass clippings are diminished.

There are several other practical benefits which accrue from landscape alteration: expanding areas utilizing ground covers creates a "organic sink" which eliminates the need to recycle some of your yard trim materials. Leaves can be allowed to fall under trees in autumn and remain there: earthworms and bacteria will work year-round to convert those materials into organic nutrients which will themselves continue to nurture (without additional fertilizer application) and enhance the health of trees and ground covers alike.

Augmenting your need for mulches under trees and in mulch island plantings also provides a "sink" for leaves and brush which can be readily shred into mulch or composted on site, eliminating the need to transport those materials to an off-site recycling facility. Furthermore, your landscape will

benefit as your management regimen shifts to incorporate as much organic material as possible, saving you the cost for expensive soil amendments and fertilizers, and naturally revitalizing the soil in lawn and garden areas.

Using grass in a landscape has its place, but consideration should be given to how much turf is really necessary — if any at all — and how much does it cost to maintain that lawn. Reducing lawn area reduces expense, reduces solid waste generation, increases natural beauty and thereby enhances corporate image.

Lastly, the transition away from turf need not take place overnight: a phase-in period can be developed which favorably balances plant and mulch installation costs against maintenance and recycling costs, leading to property management cost savings — and ultimately leading to a sustainable and healthy environment for employees, customers, and your surrounding community.

Hardy and Reliable Native Plants for Sunny Locations

Herbaceous Perennials

Wild columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)
Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)
Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
White wood aster (*Aster divaricatus*)
New England aster (*Aster novae-angliae*)
Blue false indigo (*Baptisia australis*)
Wild indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*)
Tickseed Sunflower (*Coreopsis tinctoria*)
Threadleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*)
Hay-scented fern (*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*)
Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
Joe pye weed (*Eupatorium fistulosum*)

Oxeye sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*)
Grass-leaf blazing star (*Liatris graminifolia*)
Gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*)
Wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)
Horsemint (*Monarda punctata*)
Sundrops (*Oenothera perennis*)
Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*)
Moss phlox (*Phlox subulata*)
Obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*)
Early coneflower (*Rudbeckia fulgida*)
Black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
Fire pink (*Silene virginica*)
Rigid goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*)

Wrinkle-leaf goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*)
Showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*)
Bird's foot violet (*Viola pedata*)

Native Grasses

Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*)
Broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*)
Canada wild rye (*Elymus canadensis*)
Bottlebrush Grass (*Elymus hystrix*)
Virginia Wild Rye (*Elymus virginicus*)
Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)
Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)



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viewed on the Internet. For a complete schedule and online access, visit www.greenmanshow.com.

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